

VZCZCXRO9232
RR RUEH DU RUEH MR RUEH RN
DE RUEH TO #0616/01 1841221
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 021221Z JUL 08 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY MAPUTO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9066
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0189
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MAPUTO 000616

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TELEGRAM RECEIVED WITH MISSING PARAGRAPHS)

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/02/2018

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SUBJECT: NUMBER OF ZIMBABWEAN POLITICAL REFUGEES ON THE RISE

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Todd Chapman for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Poloffs recently met with the UNHCR representative in Maputo to discuss the Zimbabwe political situation's affect on Mozambique and subsequently visited the Mozambique/Zimbabwe border towns of Machipanda, Manica, and Chimoio on June 26-27 to gauge the situation on the ground prior to the elections. While the atmosphere appeared to be "business as usual" on the surface, visits with local government officials, Mozambican NGOs, and multilateral organizations revealed that a growing number of Zimbabweans are entering Mozambique and requesting asylum to escape political violence. In addition, sources highlighted claims that elements of Zimbabwean police intelligence were entering Mozambique to round up MDC supporters. With Mugabe "winning" the runoff and already sworn in for another term, the stream of Zimbabweans entering Mozambique is expected to continue.
END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) UNHCR representative in Maputo Victoria Akyeampong told poloff June 24 that cooperation with the Mozambican government (GRM) concerning the Zimbabwe crisis has been "difficult." Despite an increase in the number of Zimbabweans entering Mozambique, the GRM continues to treat them as "normal SADC traffic." According to Akyeampong, the GRM refugee agency INAR has, on several occasions, refused to respond to UNHCR's request to initiate a process that would culminate with Zimbabweans in Mozambique being granted refugee status. The UNHCR recently secured an arrangement whereby the UNHCR will identify camps in the three provinces bordering Zimbabwe (Manica, Tete, and Gaza) providing assistance and temporary protection to Zimbabweans, making them immune from deportation even if their documents expire. UNHCR has already identified possible camp sites in Gaza and is looking a site in Manica and Tete. The arrangement was reached on the condition that UNHCR's involvement is solely on the basis of a first-of-its-kind case study and not as a refugee situation.

¶3. (C) Akyeampong noted that while previously most Zimbabweans coming to Mozambique were seeking food and a better economic situation, the pattern has changed since the first round of elections in March to mostly include MDC sympathizers who have no intention of returning to Zimbabwe while Mugabe remains in power. She estimated that there are approximately 200,000 Zimbabweans currently in Mozambique. She also said that UNHCR had received reports that Zimbabwean intelligence agents or possibly ZANU-PF officials have been entering Mozambique to harass MDC sympathizers and take them back to Zimbabwe. UNHCR believes that these acts are being perpetrated with the tacit approval of local Mozambican

authorities. This information was repeated in a separate meeting on June 26 with UNHCR's local field representative in Chimoio Josep Zapatera (strictly protect), who specifically cited examples of such occurrences in Gaza province. Zapatera (on loan from UNCHR Afghanistan and with previous work experience in Bosnia and Serbia) has been in-country for a month and spends most of his time interviewing Zimbabweans in small camps in the bush. He estimates that there are at least 3,000 Zimbabwean political refugees in Manica province alone, although officially UNHCR has received approximately 600 applications for political asylum in the past month. Zapatera also relayed reports that Zimbabwean police and possible army units were stationed near the border to "catch" any returning MDC supporters attempting to vote in the June 27 runoff.

¶4. (SBU) At first glance, the June 26-27 drive by poloffs to the border towns of Machipanda, Manica, and Chimoio revealed a business as usual atmosphere. Traffic along the corridor from Beira to the border was moderate and the towns showed no signs of being overwhelmed by Zimbabweans. However, while Manica city, Mayor Mogne Candeeiro towed the usual party line that that Zimbabweans and Mozambicans have always been one big family, he did not hide frustration concerning the challenges his town is facing with the influx of Zimbabweans.

Candeeiro estimated that as much as a quarter of his town's 45,000 residents are now Zimbabwean and noted that limited resources are creating a difficult situation. Zimbabwean children receive schooling, medical services are provided to Zimbabweans, and a temporary site has been allotted for Zimbabweans to sell their products, but as the number of arrivals increase he is finding it more and more burdensome. Mozambicans in Manica city have been mostly accepting of the arrivals and generally are critical of Mugabe and ZANU-PF.

¶5. (SBU) In Chimoio, residents share the critical view of Mugabe, in stark contrast to the local authorities. Many of

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the people spoken with have visited Zimbabwe recently and think that Mugabe is plunging the country into an abyss. One truck driver who has been visiting Zimbabwe regularly told poloff that he felt obliged to place ZANU-PF posters and bumper stickers on his truck while in Zimbabwe, so that the "war veterans," police, and intelligence officials would not harass him for being an MDC supporter. Another Chimoio resident said he would not be visiting Zimbabwe as regularly as he used to because of the increased presence of armed Zimbabwean soldiers and sympathizers roaming around intimidating people.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: The party line towed by the local GRM officials during the meetings was decidedly out of touch with the views of local residents. While UNHCR is attempting to adjust to the influx of more politically-oriented refugees entering the country, including MDC supporters, the GRM continues to deny the existence of these refugees. More worrisome are the reports of tacit support for Zimbabwean officials to enter into Mozambique to pursue MDC supporters. Post will follow up with UNHCR officials to discuss next steps on addressing this troubling issue with senior GRM officials. END COMMENT.

Chapman